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ABSTRACT

Cable television (CATV) has often been put to educational uses too quickly, too comprehensively, too superficially, and for the wrong reasons. In Pennsylvania, as in other states, there is a need for a systematic approach to coordinating CATV with other educational resources. The Pennsylvania Department of Education can promote the more effective use of cable by: 1) identifying the educational needs which can be served by CATV; 2) maintaining current information on available cable facilities; 3) designing a plan to provide cable channels to education; 4) encouraging the development of educational programing; 5) providing evaluation services for cable-related activities; and 6) fostering research on new uses of CATV. Cable's technology is powerful and its potential great, but educators must begin to make use of this promise or cable's channels will be given over to other purposes. In order to actualize this potential, educators will have to develop subject matter programs, have their schools wired for cable, explore cost-sharing and facility-sharing options, and confine their requests to realistic programs. (PB)

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AND
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A POSITION PAPER

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of the

Pennsylvania Learning Resources Association

Sponsored

CATV and Education Conference

Seven Springs Mountain Resort

Champion, Pa.

May 11-12, 1973

Conference Co-Chairmen

Charles Forsythe
Earl Cardellino

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JANUARY 1974

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At the 1973 Spring Conference of the Pennsylvania Learning Resources Association a Chapter in the history of Cable television was written. It was agreed that the pressures to use cable television are great and that the purpose of its use are many and varied-sometimes mutually reinforcing, sometimes not. The intensity of the pressures and the multiplicity and frequent inherent conflict of purposes, combine to create a set of circumstances in which cable television is often used too quickly, too comprehensively and too superficially for the wrong reasons, or not used at all. There must be a systematic approach to coordinating CATV with other available resources for the purpose of achieving more effective education.

This would mean to the members of the Pennsylvania Learning Resources Association that there is a need for earlier attention to the educational purposes for cable and to the processes by which the purposes are definitely limited and articulated. It is believed that this is an area to which the Pennsylvania Learning Resources Association might usefully give both attention and support, and it was to the appropriate use of cable that the conference was dadicated.

Participants and principals in the conference recommended that in order to provide for the immediate preservation of cable television as an educational resource for Pennsylvania, to provide for the development of utilization and evaluation programs which might foster an understanding of the value and importance of cable programming, and to provide for the further development of this relatively unexploited educational resource, it is the position of the Pennsylvania Learning Resources Association that:

1. The Pennsylvania Department of Education, in association with local school districts, both public and private, colleges and universities,

should identify the educational needs which can be served by cable television. The above potential users of cable could assist in the development of a planned process for cable's contribution to education.

2. The Department of Education, in conjunction with cable operators, should identify, publish and maintain current information on cable facilities that are already available.
3. The Pennsylvania Department of Education should design a plan and support appropriate legislation for establishment of a program to provide maximum cable channels for education.
4. The Pennsylvania Department of Education should encourage local curriculum planners to develop new cable programs for their individual curriculums. These programs must be locally field tested and revised before being presented to the Pennsylvania Department of Education for possible general distribution. After acceptance for distribution the Secretary of Education must insure that there is a continuing evaluation of the materials.
5. The Secretary of Education should provide for a continuing evaluation of processes and services related to all phases of cable and education.
6. The Department of Education should encourage educational projects which will add new dimensions to the uses of cable.

The Department of Education's most productive role in the development of cable television must be in improving the processes by which educators, cable operators and the community may, themselves, determine their own next steps in the use of appropriate

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learning activities which can be distributed over cable. The Department must continue to emphasize the educational needs by creating an environment of greater understanding about how learning actually goes on in the classroom via cable. The Department must develop clearly defined cable policy linking the uses of the medium to curriculum and goals and setting priorities for new program development in accordance with overall educational goals. Thus, given the general state of knowledge about cable, the development of cable, as an educational tool, will be years ahead.

While the technology of cable is highly developed and widely dispersed throughout the Commonwealth there are continual improvements being made that are designed to provide better quality. It is likely that in the next decade we will see many technological innovations in cable which will alter materially the present methods by which cable provides a service. At the present, there does not appear to be any other development on the horizon which will have any greater effect on education than will be produced by the orderly and widespread use of cable television. It is possible that the increasing needs of education to deal with problems will result in the use of many more cable services than now envisioned.

Cable operators have challenged educators to be wise leaders in the use of cable. The Federal Communications Commission has given priority to the interest of the community of peoples inhabiting our Commonwealth by opening up avenues to provide diversified television services through as many signals as possible. Commissioner Lee of the FCC had the following reminder for conference participants:

> "For the clock is running out on the educator. The new and allusiveness of cable television might very easily get away from you and then it will be to late. When the Commission was considering its cable rules two years ago, we heard one cable operator after another deliver his or her sales pitch about the unlimited

public benefits cable could bring if only we would give them distant signals. The educators were equally adept in delivering their pitches about what they could do about their schools and communities if only we would give them enough free channels for instruction.

"The position of the educators wasn't too surprising given the promises of the cable enterpreneurs. The Commission, rightly, recognized there is some merit to both arguments. Some members having a greater belief in the educational potential of cable argues long and hard to have one or more free channels set aside for educational public access and governmental use."

Mr. Fred Cohen speaking for Commissioner Lee continued with:

"Cable television is going to present you with some rare opportunities to experiment with reforming the educational system opening the classroom, and improving the educational opportunities for all those now deprived. Thus, you should not waste your time discussing what might be done with cable, or arguing over whether 20% or 30% of the channels would be reserved. Rather, you must now plan the orderly integration of cable into your existing matrix of educational television and radio, ITFS microwave services and the forth - coming satellite technology. It will mean sharing your programming and personnel resources, and coordinating planning on the local and state levels as well as the Federal level.

"Your preoccupation at this time undoubtedly is with the local franchising process. Although it is not important to insure a well-planned franchise is granted

in your community, after full public participation and disclosure, don't forget to look beyond the mere signing of that franchising. Direct franchising, that mere piece of paper, should be the beginning of your work and certainly not the end. Once the channel or channels are set aside for your use you must be prepared to use them. Neither the Commission nor the cable operators are going to look favorably upon the educational establishment if those educational channels lay fallow. For, as we specifically stated in our rules, the use of the educational channels for five years is designed to encourage innovation on the uses of cable TV. After this developmental period the FCC intends to determine through consultation with state and local authorities whether to expand or curtail the free use of channels, or to continue this developmental period. And, it should be noted that, when the cable compromise was made at the FCC, some people were willing to bet these educational channels would remain unused at the end of this five-year period. The handwriting is on the wall or perhaps on the cable. If the educational communities are not effectively using the channels within the next few years, it is going to be difficult for the Commission to retain any free dedicated channels; for breathing down hard on your back will be the program suppliers, the sports interests, banking and computer services among others all competing for a more predominant role. Though the term conjures up all sorts of ugly connotations, it should be recognized that the Commission is basically subsidizing education through our cable scheme. There is nothing wrong with doing this, especially when you look at the terms of other Federal subsidizing programs, but subsidies sometimes suffer from quick deaths if contribution to the public good cannot be clearly established.

Just what is the role of the cable operator, the educator, the FCC and the PDE as cable moves ahead in the transition stage changing rapidly from TV station concepts to communications processing and distribution systems?

With this in mind some policy decisions were recommended. Mr. Harry Plotkin, at a luncheon meeting speaking to PLRA members and guests, stated:

> ". . . you are part of the decision-making policy; it is a right, and also an important responsiblity."

He further reiterated almost verbatim what others stated:

> "The big problem is to make sure these channels are not gobbled up and utilized for commercial purposes. The right and maybe the obligation to make sure these channels are available is something terribly important to fight for, and to make the fight early in the game. These things, otherwise, can be gobbled up for commercial purposes, you can't get them back--believe me.
>
> Lay out the claim early, get a partnership whereby the cable company and the other participants are helping to get it started by providing some of the seed money and reduced rates."

Mr. Cohen further stated:

> "The time for delivering pie in the sky speeches about the wonders of cable is long past. It would be easy to tell you that cable would make every Alice and Jerry a viable Einstein, or if you only had enough channels, cable could prevent drug addiction, raise teachers salaries and put more money into the federal and state education budget. You have heard all these types of predictions before, I am sure, but it is time to get back to earth and the nitty-gritty of new technology."

Dr. Harold Wigren stated the National Education Association's position, a portion of which dealt with:

> "Educators and librarians have been especially active in the franchise fight nationwide. NEA has been a Paul Revere in the effort."

The NEA thrust provides vital information and takes a firm stand as indicated in its guidelines that are condensed here by Dr. Wigren.

> "In other words, we're asking that spectrum space be reserved on the cable for schools just as spectrum space was reserved for education in the early 1950's on broadcast channels. Had this <u>not</u> been done, there would be no public (educational) broadcast today! If it was important to do this for educational broadcasting, why is it not equally important for educational cablecasting?
>
> "It seems to us to be totally unfair to give the burden of proof to the educator when the FCC is not asking the cable operator for documentation as to what he is going to do with 'company' channels. Why put the burden of proof on education and not the cable operator?"

It seemed to be agreed by all that cable is a moving force. Taken from the cable operators view Mr. William Vogel summarized the following as his comments at the PLRA conference:

> "First, the administrator and a member of the school board should make known to the town council that they are vitally interested in the educational advantages which can be obtained through the inter-connection of the schools and the cable system, and they should ask permission to either advise, or be a part of, the council franshise negotiation team. At the same time, the administrator, and his curriculum consultants should

begin planning on how they are going to effectively utilize the tremendously valuable teaching aid called television. Simply because a cable operator must provide a non-broadcast educational channel, it does not automatically follow that a worth-while educational TV situation is going to occur in the educational unit. He is merely providing the vehicle; the educator must provide the subject matter.

"Second, educators should consider what they would like to have included in the franchise concerning cable connections to the school facilities at a nominal charge, as soon as the cable system is constructed and energized. If a building is already wired for television, they can begin immediately to take advantage of the programming from the educational broadcasting stations carried on the cable system. If the building is not wired, they could probably arrange to have this done by the construction crew concurrently with their building of the cable system, and thereby save a considerable sum of money.

"Third, they should investigate the possiblility of a 'share-the cost,share-the facilty' type arrangement for the installation and operation of a closed-circuit TV studio. The reason for this is that if the cable operator anticipates that he will eventually be serving over 3,500 subscribers he will be required by the FCC to orginate some local programming which could make part time availability of the studio advantageous to him. The likelihood of scheduled conflicts would no doubt be rather remote since the educators operate primarily during daylight hours while local cable TV programming would be done mostly after school hours.

"Fourth, and perhaps the most important is that they should be <u>realistic</u> in their

thoughts and requests. They should remember that, contrary to some opinions, cable TV is still a rather high-risk venture, and that it is getting increasingly costly to get a system off the ground. Even the best managed system is unlikely to show a profit for several years and, therefore, requests for several dedicated channels, or for fully-equipped studios at no cost, or any of a number of extravagant requests would be doomed to failure. This in turn could affect the outcome of all other suggestions.

"In these ways then, you, as educators, can and should become involved in the franchising process. Responsible cable TV operators will welcome your objective and frank concerns."

The thrust of the conference appeared to be a plea for a joint agreement, by a unified group of educators, on approaches to the use of cable. Such an agreement must recognize that CATV alone cannot provide the complete answer to our educational needs but must be incorporated with other available forms of educational strategies. Goals, visions, plans and implementation procedures are in the hands of educators. Firm and immediate action by the educational community will have an unassessable value to the Commonwealth's educational programs for the future.